



**Mississippi Center for Justice**

**For Immediate Release**

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### **MCJ Launches Mississippi Mask Drive to Provide Homemade Cloth Masks to Mississippians Who Work and Live in Locked Facilities During Pandemic**

Today the Mississippi Center for Justice (MCJ) launched a Mississippi mask drive in which volunteers can sew cloth masks to help protect the thousands of Mississippians who are unusually vulnerable to COVID-19 because they work or live in locked facilities like prisons, jails, mental health institutions, and restitution centers.

Because basic protective necessities like surgical masks are often not available to these staff and residents, MCJ has created a webpage, <https://www.mscenterforjustice.org/masks>, through which facilities can request cloth masks and volunteers can learn how to make and where to send masks. Volunteers can also sign up for live mask-making video workshops and download instructional materials. MCJ has already received orders for over 1,000 masks and counting.

The Centers for Disease Control has promulgated "[Crisis Capacity Strategies](#)," which provide that, when surgical and N95 face masks are not available, cloth masks can be used. This effort is part of MCJ's tradition of responding to crises, which included campaigns to help poor and marginalized Mississippians recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill.

"Every person who can sew or learn how to sew a mask can make a tremendous difference right now," said Paloma Wu, Deputy Director of Impact Litigation at MCJ. "Every mask you give makes our communities and our shared health care system better able to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic." MCJ has joined other groups in urging for release of residents who do not pose public safety concerns so that facilities can better contain an outbreak. "When all responsible population reduction measures have been exhausted, staff and individuals who remain need masks," said Wu.

MCJ is joined in the Mississippi Mask Drive by partners from across Mississippi, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi, Catholic Charities, the Catholic Diocese of Jackson, and other religious and community-based organizations. Jason Coker, Field Coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Mississippi, discussed the reasons for his organization's involvement in the effort: "Because of our conviction that God loves everyone and calls us to do the same, we absolutely believe that employees of correctional facilities and those who live there deserve the right to be as safe as possible during this COVID-19 pandemic. In close quarters, these fellow human beings are at a higher risk than many of us. Please join us in our efforts to provide safety masks for this population. This is one way we are trying to be the presence of God in the midst of extraordinary circumstances."

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